



## CLEAN WATER ACTION

CONNECTICUT

### **Testimony of Roger Smith, Campaign Director, Clean Water Action Energy and Technology Committee March 16, 2010**

#### **Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 640: AN ACT CONCERNING LOW-INCOME ENERGY RATES.**

Clean Water Action is a national environmental non-profit dedicated to protecting human health with 25,000 Connecticut members. We have worked on energy-related issues in Connecticut since 1998.

Clean Water Action is deeply concerned about the equity and distributional impact of our energy policies. In Massachusetts we serve as an environmental representative on the steering committee of the Green Justice Coalition to ensure efficiency and clean energy benefit low-income communities and communities of color.

Connecticut has an aging energy infrastructure which requires new investment. From power plants and transmission lines that were constructed in the early post-war period to houses and commercial buildings which are in many cases date from well before the war, we are again in a time when investment in our infrastructure is needed. At an individual level, energy efficiency and renewable energy programs are vital tools for households and businesses to use to upgrade their buildings. At a system level, both efficiency and renewable energy investments also help us retire aging and expensive power plants and potentially defer transmission and distribution investments.

While investments in our energy infrastructure is necessary to update our energy systems, reduce the impact of rising fossil fuel prices and meet our air quality and global warming pollution standards, the cost of the upgrades cannot be permitted to fall on those who are least able to afford it. For this reason we wholeheartedly support a rate structure where limited income customers pay a lower rate. The DPUC and utilities need to make such rates available by a date certain. There is no time for delay. To the extent this prevents collections it financially has benefits for all customers. It also contributes to a more stable society by keeping our neighbors from having their utility service terminated, or from having them choose between electricity and other basic needs.

We support the provision to not only provide discounted rates but also ensure that conservation programs (which can reduce energy usage and thus bills) 30% or more are integrated with it. We suggest changing "energy audit" to "weatherization services" and support requiring the household to "agree" to complete such a program rather than have to finish it.

We also support a tiered rate structure for residential customers where those who use the most energy pay the highest rate. It would provide an incentive for conservation. Limited income customers are generally not large energy users and those who are cost insensitive that they choose to use the most electricity should pay for their outsized impact on the system as a whole.